

for Wayne

Contents

- [Title Page](#)
 - [Copyright](#)
 - [Acknowledgments](#)
 - [Dedication](#)
-
1. [What Poem](#)
 2. [The Roman Numerals](#)
 3. [Butterfly](#)
 4. [Reality](#)
 5. [The Chinese Girl](#)
 6. [Smudges](#)
 7. [It Takes Two](#)
 8. [The First Time](#)
 9. [Circles](#)
 10. [Grandpa Brushed His
Teeth](#)
 11. [Coffee Man](#)
 12. [Where Is My Head?](#)

13. [Survivor Guilt](#)
14. [The Young Cougar](#)
15. [Radio in the Distance](#)
16. [Face Value](#)
17. [The Plank and the Screw](#)
18. [102 Today](#)
19. [The Pounding Rabbit](#)
20. [Mountains and Songs](#)
21. [It All Depends](#)
22. [The Elevation of Ideals](#)
23. [Birgitte Hohlenberg](#)
24. [Pep Talk](#)
25. [Preface to Philosophy](#)
26. [You Know What](#)
27. [A Bit about Bishop
Berkeley](#)
28. [The Step Theory](#)
29. [My '75 Chevy](#)
30. [For A.](#)
31. [Art Lessons](#)
32. [A Few Ideas about
Rabbits](#)
33. [The Value of Discipline](#)
34. [Pea Jacket](#)
35. [The Ukrainian Museum](#)

36. [The 1870s](#)
37. [One Thing Led to Another](#)
38. [The Rabbi with a Puzzle Voice](#)
39. [Syntactical Structures](#)
40. [The World of Us](#)
41. [Curtain](#)
42. [Homage to Meister Eckhart](#)
43. [The Incoherent Behavior of Most Lawn Furniture](#)
44. [This Schoolhouse Look](#)
45. [The Street](#)
46. [Paris Again](#)
47. [London, 1815](#)
48. [Of Copse and Coppice](#)
49. [Manifestation and Mustache](#)
50. [Shipwreck in General](#)
51. [French Art in the 1950s](#)
52. [Three Poems in Honor of Willem de Kooning I Felt](#)

[The Door to the River](#)
[Zot](#)

53. [Alone and Not Alone](#)

- [Funder](#)
[Acknowledgments](#)
- [The Publisher's Circle of](#)
[Coffee House Press](#)
- [About the Author](#)

What Poem

What poem
were you thinking of,
my dear,
as you breezed out the door
in your long coat fur-tipped
at the top?

What animal
once wore that fur
and licked it
with a long, raspy tongue
that lolled to one side
in the afternoon shade?

If only you too
could lope across
the Serengeti Plain
and grab something
in your powerful jaws,
instead of pausing
at the door and saying,

as if in afterthought,
“Write a poem
while I’m out.”

The Roman Numerals

It must have been hard
for the Romans to multiply
—I don't mean reproduce,
but to do that computation.

Step inside a roman numeral
for a moment, a long one
such as MDCCLIX. Look
at the columns and
pediments
and architraves: you cannot
move them,
but how beautiful they are
and august! However, try to
multiply
MDCCCLXIV by MCCLVIII.

How did they do it?

I asked this question some
years ago
and never found an answer
because I never looked for
one,
but it is pleasant,
living with this question.

Perhaps the Romans weren't
good at math,
unlike the Arabs, who
arrived
with baskets of numerals,
plenty
for everyone. We still have
more than we need today.

I have a 6 and a 7 that,
when put side by side, form
my age.

Come to think of it,
I'd rather be LXVII.

dreaming you are a man.

I have spent my whole life
thinking I was a boy, then a
man,
also a person and an
American
and a physical entity and a
spirit
and maybe a little bit
butterfly.
Maybe I should be more
butterfly,

that is, lurch into a room
with bulging eyes and big
flapping wings
that throw a choking powder
onto people who scream and
fall dead,

almost. For I would rescue
them
with the celestial music of
my beauty
and my utter harmlessness,

Butterfly

Chaung Tzu wrote about the
man
who dreamed he was a
butterfly
and when he woke up
wondered if he weren't now
a butterfly dreaming he was
a man.

I love this idea
though I doubt that Chaung
Tzu
really thought that a man
would think
he is a butterfly,

for it's one thing to wake up
from a dream in the night
and another to spend your
whole life

my ætherial disregard of
what they are.

Reality

Reality has a transparent
veneer
that looks exactly like the
reality beneath it.
If you look at anything,
your hands, for instance, and
wait,
you will see it. Then
it will flicker and vanish,
though it is still there.
You must wait a day or two
before attempting to see it
again,
for each attempt uses up
your current allotment of
reality viewing.
Meanwhile there is a coffee
shop

where you can sit and drink
coffee,
and where you will be
tempted
to look down at the cup and
see
the transparent veneer
again,
but that is only because you
are overstimulated.
Do not order another cup. Or
do.
It will have no effect on the
veneer.

Sometimes the veneer
becomes detached
and moves slightly away
from reality,
as when you look up and see
a refrigerator
in refrigerator heaven, cold
and quiet.
But then the veneer snaps
back

to its former position and
vanishes.

This is a normal occurrence

—

do not be alarmed by it.
Instead, drive to the store
and buy something
that looks like milk, return
home and place it in the
refrigerator.

Days go by, years go by,
people
grow older and die,
surrounded,
if they are lucky, by younger
people
who do not know what to do
with feelings whose veneers
have slipped to the side, far
to the side, and are staying
there
too long. But eventually they
will grow hungry
and tired, and an image of
dinner and bed

will float in like a leaf
that fell from who knows
where, and sleep.

The Chinese Girl

When I order a coffee that is
half-real, half-decaf, with
half-and-half, the women
behind the counter
invariably give me a blank
look and wait for something
to come clear in their heads,
and when it doesn't I repeat,
slowly, my order, gesturing
with my fingers to
demonstrate the half-real,
then the half-decaf part.
When it finally registers on
them and they fill the cup, I
point to the carton of half-
and-half. Then one of the
two—they work in pairs—
asks, “Shu gah?”

However, the youngest of the morning crew of five understands better than the other four, so I always hope to have her wait on me, not only because of her better English but because she is the cutest. Of course not all Chinese girls look the same, but descriptions of them tend to sound the same, so I'm not sure that it would help to say that she has straight black hair, parted in the front and held in place by the bakery uniform's light-green kerchief, a slightly flattened nose, and dark eyes, with a small mole on the right above her top lip. Her modest demeanor lends her an air of innocence. She is what, around eighteen?

I always look forward to seeing her on my weekly visit to the bakery. This morning when I walked slowly along the display case of dazzling muffins, buns, rolls, danishes, and other pastries, trying to decide among them, I heard her voice on the other side, asking, "Can I help you?" Never before had one of the crew left the cash register area to do this.

Concealing my surprise, I asked her, "Are the croissants ready yet?"

"I will see."

When she came back from the kitchen she said, "Five minutes."

"Then I'll have one of these danishes."

“You want small coffee, no?
Half-regular, half-decaf, with
half-and-half?”

Astonished, I said, “Yes, that’s
right. You have a good
memory.”

“I remember *you*,” she said,
causing my heart to flutter.
But my composure returned
when she asked, “Shu gah?”

At the register she handed
me the change from a five. I
took a single and, pointedly
ignoring the tip jar, handed
it to her, saying “This is for
you. *Sheh sheh*.”

“Thank you,” she said,
lowering her eyes and
almost imperceptibly
drawing back.

I got the signal, so I headed
toward an empty table,

where I removed the plastic lid from the paper cup and took a bite out of the danish. A band of steam rose from the coffee, like a curtain on a miniature stage. The Chinese girl and I are living in a remote part of China. Our past lives have been erased. She is unspeakably devoted to me and I adore her. We say little, passing our days in a state of calm I could never have imagined.

Smudges

Smattering of gray
puffs rocks are they
large ones but if you pick
them up light
too light but fun to
lift and marvel at
they don't make
"sense" they
aren't broken they are
what you
have laughing in
you almost out
smudges come out of the
rock
you breathe in and
out the same gray rock
each time as if looped in a
cartoon

of a sleeping man from
whom z's
emanate

Smattering of gray puffs a
man is one of them
a cloud a smudge a
powder of stone
from which a city
arises with people in it
and ideas that flow
toward you and through
you
it's too late it's already
happened to the next
you
and the gray smudge that is
your face turning
into your next face the one
you forget
as soon as it happens as
you fall away
among other smudges that
are falling away
smudges and puffs falling
away

It Takes Two

My replacement in the
universe
is the little tyke who'll soon
arrive
and let me be superfluous if
and when I feel like being so.

I don't really mean that.
It's just the openness
of what will or might be,
when what matters most
is the right now of now,
which,
when I draw back and look
reveals
an old fool in the foggy bliss
of whatever this morning is.

Straighten up, old thing!

You aren't *that* old and he or
she
will reach right up and grasp
some years and break them
off
your psyche—what is it? like
stardust?
glittering on those tiny tiny
fingers.

The First Time

The first time Marcello went
outside
the sun and moon were at
his side
(his happy mom and happy
dad)
(also the happiness known as
granddad).
The first time Marcello
breathed the outside air
he seemed to like it there.
The first time he got in a car
it zoomed him fast and far
(for such a little guy)
to Brooklyn: “Hi,
Brooklyn!” he didn’t shout:
his words were too little to
get out.

But clearly in his sleeping
face
he felt comfy in the human
race.

Circles

Marcello sees
 the sun is yellow.
But then at night
 it's white.
No, that's the moon
 or a white balloon
above his bed—
 wait, it's his head!
Colored circles rise and fall.
 Marcello seems to like
 them all.

Grandpa Brushed His Teeth

This morning Grandpa
brushed his teeth
so hard it knocked Marcello
down
but he got back up to watch
Grandpa brush those teeth

Ah Grandpa brushing up and
down
with joy he sang almost Glug
glug!
The toothpaste tasted
excellent
and the brush it zigged and
zagged

It's a good thing he has teeth
to brush

and that he likes the
brushing of them
The only missing ones are
Wisdom
and Marcello does not need
them

And Grandpa doesn't either
Good-bye to Wisdom teeth
and Wisdom
Buon giorno to Marcello
Little toothbrush fellow

Coffee Man

She might be hearing the burbling song of the bird outside, but it is impossible to tell, since she has rolled over and I think gone back to sleep. If I were to say quietly, “Good morning, dear, here is your coffee,” she would open her eyes and manage a groggy “Thank you.” But when she realizes that I am standing there without coffee, I would forget which tense I’m waiting to lift from the jar with the red lid in the kitchen.

Where Is My Head?

It makes you nervous to
think not about death
but about dying and being
dead yourself
but when you don't think
about it
it doesn't exist,
at least in your universe.
And since that's the universe
you happen to be in
you want to stay there:
you have to fix the world
and then save it,
you have to do that one thing
you can't remember what it
is
but you know it's there
somewhere

like the death you forgot for
a moment.

I should have spent my life
meditating so deeply that the
thought of death
would be relaxing like a
breeze or a feather
but instead I have spent it
promising myself
that someday I would go to
that special place
in my psyche where the
spirit enters and leaves
and make my peace with the
beast I call myself.

I hate myself for dying, how
could I have done this!
But all I did was nothing
other than believe that I was
actually important!
Everything my mother did
proved it.
But when she died she just
glided away—

she didn't mind at all.
She didn't think she was
important
and she had a farmgirl's
view of dying:
chickens do it all the time,
they run around the yard
with blood
gushing from where their
heads used to be.

I wish I could do that!

In Paris the heads that
dropped into the basket
—were they still thinking
about the executioner?

Today I am my own
executioner.

Survivor Guilt

It's very easy to get.
Just keep living and you'll
 find yourself
getting more and more of it.
You can keep it or pass it on,
but it's a good idea to keep a
 small portion
for those nights when you're
 feeling so good
you forget you're human.
 Then drudge it up
and float down from the
 ceiling
that is covered with stars
 that glow in the dark
for the sole purpose of being
 beautiful for you,
and as you sink their beauty
 dims and goes out—

Its notes resound like
monstrous ricochets.

But when you wake up, your
body
seems to fit fairly well, like a
tailored suit,
and you don't look too bad in
the mirror.

Hi there, feller!
Old feller, young feller, who
cares?

Whoever it was who felt
guilty last night,
to hell with him. That was
then.

The Young Cougar

The doors swing open and in walks a young cougar wearing white shoes and light-blue socks, come to help his father. “Where do we put this in the registry?” one servant asks another. Or *they* were wearing the shoes and socks.

I mean it flies out the nearest
door or window,
its whoosh raising the hair
on your forearms.
If only your arms were
green, you could have two
small lawns!
But your arms are just there
and you are kaput.
It's all your fault, anyway,
and it always has been—
the kind word you thought of
saying but didn't,
the appalling decline of
human decency, global
warming,
thermonuclear nightmares,
your own small cowardice,
your stupid idea that you
would live forever—
all *tua culpa*. John Phillip
Sousa
invented the sousaphone,
which is also your fault.

Radio in the Distance

for Yvonne

Jacquette

Beneath the earth covered
with men
with snow atop their heads,
down
to where it is dark and deep,
to where
the big black vibrating blob
of wobble
is humming its one and only
note, I lie,
orange hair not in the idea of
diagonal,
a Betty not composed of
vertical fish
or dog with grid-mark
cancellations,

Face Value

From a face comes a body an
entire body
and from a body everything

but I can't face you
fully
not yet
maybe never

and even if I did or thought I
did
how would I know

How would I know
what face value is

From a face comes face value
and from face value a lot of
baling wire

—the face scribbled over
with dark coils of it

I was born in Kentucky
almost

There were no faces there
so I was born elsewhere
from inside a fencepost
to which barbed wire had
been affixed
by Frederic Remington

The air was cool, the night
calm
and each star had a face
like a movie star's or
someone in the family

They too had star quality I
thought

but they had statue quality
and then turned sideways
like music blending into
fabric and little curtains
along the kitchen windows

but easy as an orchestra of
toy atoms
lazy with buzz and fizz in
their drift
as if above this late and lost
Manhattan
spread out like a diagram of
what we want
from heaven, wherever it is
when we think
we know what it is and even
when it really is.

attractive kitchen windows

Now you can sit down at this
table

and look me square in the
eye

and tell me what you've been
wanting to

or you can stand up like a
photograph on a piano

and sing to me
a song that has no words or
music

Which is it? —But

a heavy magnetic force pulls
you to the wall
and holds you there

As soon as you get used to it
it lets you go

for a while

and then *your* heavy
magnetic force pulls the

wall to *you*
and you walk around with a
wall stuck to your side
The Wall of Forgetting
it's called

but it's not a wall it's a
mirror
that picks your face up off
the floor
and whirls it onto a head
that has gone on without you

The Plank and the Screw

There *is* one thing.

In a fishing village on the
coast of Norway
an idea came forth and
spread
over the country and from
there
to the rest of the world,
namely
that floating inside the sun
was its power source:
a plank and a screw
that had come loose from it,
and as long as they floated
around,
never far one from the other,
the sun would continue to
burn.

became so assimilated into
the everyday lives
of people that they never
thought of it—
it changed from an idea into
people,
so they forgot
and for all practical purposes
the idea ceased to exist.

But everyone has inside
them
a plank and a screw
floating around.
Everyone is warm enough
to be alive.

102 Today

If Wystan Auden were alive
today
he'd be a small tangle of
black lines
on a rumpled white
bedsheet,
his little eyes looking up at
you.

What did you bring?
Some yellow daffodils and
green stems.
Or did they bring you?

Auden once said,
“Where the hell is Bobby?”
and we looked around,
but there was no Bobby
there.

Ah, Auden, no Bobby for you.

Let's try to imagine how hot
it is
one inch from the sun.

Now that we have found it
impossible to imagine
we can go on
to the next thing we do not
understand.

Meanwhile, the plank and
the screw
continue to float—
the plank is roughly an eight-
foot
one-by-ten, the screw a
three-inch flathead—
but since there is nothing
around them
except burning gas
they are both highly visible.

Many years passed.
Gradually the idea that had
come from Norway

Just these daffodils in a clean
white vase.

The Pounding Rabbit

*After a clock designed by
Neya Churyoku (1897–
1987)*

If you know the Japanese
folktale
about the rabbit that ended
up
on the moon, you will not be
puzzled
by a table clock depicting a
rabbit
pounding rice cakes on the
moon,
but if you do not know this
story
you will look at the clock and
pound
your own head in disbelief,

as if to knock from it the
spirit
you wish to offer to the gods
who munch the rice cakes
and never turn to say thank
you
except by sending down a
genius
to create such a clock, such a
rabbit.

Mountains and Songs

Mountains of song
exert their force up through
the earth
and rise above it

Peasants and villagers
cling to it as it rises
and they sing

and then they don't
for this is a pause
in the history of the world

and its mountains and songs

I saw them rising
and I knew it was weeping
this rising

It All Depends

*Que reste-t-il de
nos amours?*

—CHARLES TRENET

*Et nos amours,
faut-il qu'il m'en
souviennne?*

—APOLLINAIRE

But it is not love that I would
speak of
for as you see, I am of
the nineteenth century,
when love was
. . . well, it all depends,
and I can't get out of it,
whatever this love is.
I will die in it and I hope
of it, it is the preamble

for the mountains were
going away
the villagers and peasants
too
folded away in cupboards
in mountains and songs

to walking in and sitting
down and saying “Hi”
before anything else has a
chance
to happen. And then
of course nothing does,
which is why you keep
saying it—
you can’t get out
of saying it. So you may as
well
take off your hat and stay a
while,
which is what you always
planned on anyway.

The nineteenth century,
what a tremendous thing
to be in love in!
Cottages go by
and music piles up
like excited dead people.
They stop but don’t,
like sleeping people who are
alive,
but it’s not that easy,

the century is more
 complicated
than one had expected
now that everyone has a pot
 and a pan
but not a love of the pot and
 the pan.
Still, look at those sailing
 ships
on the wide main and the
 stairways
that spiral into heaven
and that bird with a long red
 beard
sticking straight up!
It's our chance to separate
 ourselves
into numerous pieces and
 have them
go in different directions,
reassembling what time had
 dispersed
in the form of granules and
 mist.
Or was it even really there?

A nightingale warbled
the tune it was supposed to
so the world would calm
down.

There's nothing wrong with
resting
alongside this shady rill and
taking medications
as if they were piles of stones
placed at intervals
by people who must have
had a meaning
in mind but with no thought
of telling you
what it was, for they didn't
know that you
would exist. Therefore, lie
down and rest.

The afternoon is mild and
your love
is not driving you crazy,
temporarily.

A rest might give you the
strength

to look love straight in the
eye
and not fade into granules
and mist.

Reverdy said
“One must try to live”—
the statement of a man
who didn’t love
or wasn’t loved
enough. A small rectangle
of light lay on his floor
and his shoe
flashed as it went by.
His wife was hidden
in the kitchen, his girlfriend
hidden in celebrity,
his God just hidden.
Pierre opened the kitchen
door,
the trap door of fame,
and the side of the cathedral,
but there was nothing there,
and when he opened his
heart
he found only a rectangle

that ended Pierre's first
book,
like a dark glint.
But God too was trying to
live.

He hasn't been around lately,
which is perhaps why
the landscape is so cheerful

—

it gets to be just itself,
brutally wonderfully so, and
birds
veer and chirp and lift
their wings to see what's
there.

It's air.
And so singing.

"But that's what *I* did,"
says Pierre
out of nowhere.
"And you can't tell
if the singing made the air
or the other way around—

of sunlight on the floor.
But it was enough.

Perhaps his wife was hiding
her love in the kitchen,
the dark kitchen in Solesmes,
where I saw her walking
briskly down the street
at the age of 97 or 98,
the same street
a few years later
she would move slowly up
and down the way
to lie down in the tomb
next to Pierre, her Pierre.

By then the girlfriend
had twirled into Eternity,
and God had hidden so
deeply
in Pierre's poems
Pierre didn't know
He was there—
He had gone back and
disappeared
beneath the period

inside a rectangle of
sunlight.)

(And not be a shoe!)

(Though have the calmness
of a shoe.)

(Beneath the bed at night.)

I will tell you this tonight.

or both, which is most
likely.”

And then, like a Frenchman,
he left, before I had a chance
to throw him around the
room,

but with respect,
affection, and mountains,
the kind they had in the
century
he was born in, mountains
as black
as his tomb, which I am
unable
to throw around now
that his wife’s in there too.

Henriette: her name.
(Henri: his real first name.)
(Her name a little feminine
version of his.)
(But we all get smaller and
smaller.)
(Hoping to fit

The Elevation of Ideals

To construct a set of ideals, a toy tool kit suffices, provided that the handles of the hammer, saw, and screwdriver are of wood and painted light blue. However, a full set of adult tools enables the builder to work more rapidly and with greater precision. Of equal importance are the raw materials, though it is possible to use various bits and pieces that one finds along the way. Remember, though, never to use metaphors in the construction, for over time they will shift, and the entire

construction will sag and perhaps collapse. (Of course these rules apply only if you live on dry land; another set covers undersea construction.)

(If you end one ideal in parentheses, you must begin the next also in parentheses. Otherwise, the joint will not bond.) To construct a solid set of ideals, do not begin too early, for all too often the ideals do not turn out to be ideals at all: they are ideas, and, like bubbles, they tend to float away and pop. In doing so they can be beautiful, but æsthetic beauty is not of great importance here, unless it happens to be the same as moral beauty, which happens very rarely in modern societies. So allow

your ideals to evolve through the decades. If you cherish them and don't think about them too much, they will change themselves by rotating on their axes while flashing on and off, to show you that all is well. When you turn fifty, they stop flashing, and for a while you think they have vanished, but it is you who have vanished, so thoroughly that even you do not know you are there. But you are.

You are, the way your mother is there, and your father, too. At this point you can obtain a set of tools and start thinking about the construction, how to begin it and where. These choices will be up to you: some choose the head, some the heart, and others even elect

to build it outside
themselves. The choice of
location might bedevil you,
but I will tell you now that
the location doesn't really
matter, except to you.

Deciding on the design of the
construction can prove
extremely difficult. This is
normal, so don't fret about it.
Just pick up the first ideal
and see how it feels in your
hand, then pick up a tool in
the other hand. You will
know immediately if they
match. If they don't, try
others. If nothing seems to
work, you are not really fifty,
and it is best to put the tools
away and try later.

But do not postpone the
resumption too long, for you
might have grown so old that
you no longer remember

your project, or you may not be physically strong enough to make difficult moral decisions. Assuming, however, that you do resume, aim to build a perfect structure, no matter how small, for if the one you do complete is good enough it will float up of its own accord and stop in midair, where you can sing to it any time you want. If a door or window falls off, do not be concerned. Another door or window will appear in its place. And anyway, you will be inside, looking out.

Birgitte Hohlenberg

*for Bill
Berkson*

I do not know who Birgitte
Hohlenberg was
or why C. A. Jensen painted
her portrait, in 1826,
but I'm glad he did, because
then I could see it
in the Statens Museum for
Kunst in Copenhagen
and buy a postcard of it and
send it to my wife:
"Isn't she beautiful?" She
being
Birgitte Hohlenberg *and* the
painting of her.
I don't know which of them I
love more.

Both are bright, calm, and
sweet—
she had a way with beauty.
You see it
in the brown satin dress with
fluffy sleeves
and big white collar edged in
lace, the hat
a light white puff around her
head
and neatly tied beneath the
chin,
her curly chestnut hair an
echo
of the ribbon curling around
the brim
and returning over the
shoulders
to a loose knot at the
collarbone,
her slender neck rising to a
face whose high color
elevates
how interested she is to be
sitting there

looking straight at you
without the slightest hint
of carnality.

Just being in her presence
would be enough
for me, now, at my age.

When did I send this card?

August 15,
2001. That long ago. Before
the Towers came down—
before a lot of things came
down. But she
has stayed up, on my wife's
dresser. How
she died I don't know, or at
what age.

C. A. Jensen lived to 78, a
long life

back then. Good for him.

I hope he was as happy
as he makes me every time I
see his picture.

I hope you see it too.

Pep Talk

Dinner is a damned nice
thing
as are breakfast and lunch
when they're good and with
the one you love.
That's a kind of dancing
sitting down and not moving
but what dances exactly
we do not know nor
need to know,
it is dancing us around
and nothing is moving
in the miracle of dinner
breakfast and lunch
and all the in-betweens
that give us pep.

Preface to Philosophy

*An ugly day it must have
been, when the first man
stood face to face with the
idea of the worthlessness
and absurdity of life.*

—W. MACNEILE DIXON

But it wasn't such an ugly day when I read Dixon's remark, at the age of fifteen, because I had already been *charmed* by the idea of the worthlessness and absurdity of life, which seemed far more sophisticated than the idea that life is meaningful and wonderful.

Now as I read it again for the first time in fifty-four years, what strikes me is not the truth of his statement, but the image of an early man's finding himself "face to face" with an idea; that is, with a ghostly being three times his size, wavering before him and communicating without speaking. Of course this is not what Dixon meant to convey; he was using "face to face" metaphorically, as an expressive device. But now I am face to face with his metaphor.

However, I can escape it by trying to picture the room in which I first read his remark, my bedroom, with its front window and side window. Sitting at my desk, I could have gazed out the front window and across the street

to the window of my friend,
from whom I had bought the
book in which Dixon's
writing appears, but if I was
propped up in bed I could
not have seen out the
window directly behind me,
whose curtain I usually kept
drawn so that anyone
stepping onto our porch
would not glance in and see
the back of my head. I did
not want anyone to look at
the back of my head.

As for its having been an
ugly day, who knows? That
is, "ugly" meaning what?
Stormy? Dark? Probably the
latter. Again he is speaking
metaphorically, referring
here to the psychological
weather of the human nearly
struck down by an idea, as I
am struck, though not down,
by the idea of a dark cloud in

a protohuman shape fifteen feet high that descended and stood before the man and emanated the idea of the worthlessness and absurdity of life.

What made the man believe it? And then go on, as I have gone on?

You Know What

Every once in a while
it occurs to me
that I am a vibration
as hard as a living creature
and that that creature is me.
It occurs when I look out of
my eyes
at it and it skulks away
into the dark area.

But you know what?
Take your philosophy
and put it in a paper bag
and carry it to a destination
and open it and see
if it looks back at you
and if it does
then you are occurring
because it is occurring too.

I learned that in my
childhood
and I did have a childhood it
was better than most
but I got nervous
when my mother got
nervous
and my father was always
quietly nervous.
We were a bundle of secret
nerves sometimes
and at others we had quite a
good time
especially my mother and
me.
We would sing duets in the
car
in harmony.
Sometimes she'd take the
alto sometimes I would.
It was oddly satisfying
to come to a stop sign
and stop.

Lithuania

wasn't something I had
heard of
and Stalin was I thought a
cartoon character
because he had only one
name and a mustache.
No one in America had a
mustache
because Hitler had had one
and he
wasn't funny he was
shouting
and shaking his face around
a tight nervous fit.
Our family was a little
nervous but not like that.
He had a real problem we
had a slight one.

One day someone told me to
relax.
I didn't know what they
meant,
I thought we were just the
way we were.

We had names and identities
and we knew
who each other was and
what to say.

So what is “relaxing”? It is
turning
into someone else in your
own body
which is what is happening
every moment anyway
but so slowly we can’t see it

—

in effect it isn’t occurring
though really it is.

to get what we want.
He convinced investors
to give him a tidy sum
to open a school for colonial
and Native American
children,
but the final funding fell
through
so he bought Rhode Island
or a chunk of it
and went back to England
and told his investors,
“Abstract ideas do not exist.”
This is obvious.
And oh, his name was
George.

A Bit about Bishop Berkeley

Bishop Berkeley
is fond of saying,
in the middle of making a
point,
“This is obvious
to anyone who takes a
moment
to examine it with an
attentive mind.”
Then he says
“Abstract ideas do not exist,”
which sounds odd
until you see what he means
by *abstract*
and remember that he says
that language makes
everything unclear,
though we need it

The Step Theory

An idea went by like a bird
and a bird went by like a
cloud
and a cloud went by like a
moment:
this is the Step Theory of
Reality
and its by-product the
Ziggurat Configuration.
Then a bird went by like an
idea—
the idea of the Step Theory
itself,
for no one thinks of it
anymore,
because its pieces lock
together seamlessly,
the way a play on words

is just words and not just
words
at the same time, for a
moment.
It can't come back
because it never went
anywhere,
unlike a cloud that can't
come back
because it went everywhere.
And so we jump around and
sputter,
to the great amusement
of our higher selves,
the ones we can't find,
their laughter echoing
forever
in the few moments we have.

That's step 1.
Now sweep idea, bird, and
cloud
into a little pile and put them
in a box.
(They will come in handy
later.)

and the bird that flew into
the idea of them.

Eventually the Ziggurat
Configuration
comes into play. The weather
is hot and humid
but the ziggurat keeps
climbing itself
until it gets to the top, then
it comes back down, only to
climb back up,
and so on. I once had an aunt
like this
—there was no stopping her

—
her face in profile formed a
ziggurat.

We children put glasses of
water
on the steps, thus
representing the soul
without knowing that it takes
a while
to learn that we have one,
but

For step 2 you must forget
who you aren't, that is,
everyone else, even though
you
are part everyone else.

This in itself is not difficult:
you do it all the time
when you're not looking.
What is difficult is what
follows:

you must make yourself
as flat as a pancake
and try to avoid having
syrup
poured onto you.

Most people will not
pour syrup onto a human
pancake,
but there are a few who
would.

Once you are flat, just lie
there
for a while. Look at those
clouds

by that time the soul had
vanished
into the process of being
itself,
like the idea, the bird, and
the cloud:
song, song, and song.

Step 3 is for later,
but I can tell you now
that it involves rolling green
pastureland
you step into but not onto
and follow your nose,
no cloud, no bird, no idea.

My '75 Chevy

Out in the yard
sits my 1975 Chevy pickup
truck,
repainted red with a white
roof,
body smooth, carburetor
rebuilt, new tires,
new dashboard, black
leather seat covers,
new floorboards, and two
new side mirrors.
In a timeless yard—
it creates its own time zone.
1975.
I can't drive simultaneously
in 1975 and 2012,
but I do
because when the truck goes
forward

Art Lessons

Narrative Painting

The Madonna never walks.

The Portrait

Bronzino did for the portrait
what the portrait did for
the sitter.

Still Life

The best still lifes have
emptiness.

The Self-Portrait

For A.

The little blue heron's back
again
Was he here when
Joe was here too
with Bill and me and you
when we were all just fifty?
If the three of us add twenty
we'll get something unreal
unlike what we are and feel
which is what Joe
couldn't imagine and ever
know:
how my grandma said now
and then
"I'm in good shape for the
shape I'm in."

I enter the sliding zone
known
as Miles Per Hour
and I'm just someone in
something red.

The self-portrait did for the
self what the self did for
the portrait.

Landscape

Landscape is a window
through which you see
what you thought.

Sculpture

Don't move.

A Few Ideas about Rabbits

It's hard to understand what
a rabbit is

It lifts a paw
and hesitates

For a moment its nose
and mouth are all cat

and those eyes, so worried
so harmless

but it might scratch you
accidentally

and that camel back
and tiger crouch

ears of lemur
perked up

Mouse-kangaroo

The rabbit runs around
eating and doing arithmetic

There is the story of the
grateful king
who offered his subject
anything

he wanted, and the subject
said

Take this chessboard and put

a coin on the first square
then double that amount for
the second

and so on, to which the king
readily consented

and when they counted
it turned out to be

a billion trillion coins
(or something like that)

more than the richest king

Anyway I do not trust a
rabbit
because I have no idea

what it is thinking
I trust a worm because it
isn't thinking

If rabbits could say
“I will hop into this garden
and eat the lettuce”
I would like them more

could afford

Imagine if the man had
asked
for rabbits

Well that's what Nature
asked for.
In Australia I think

there's an area that has
ten rabbits per square yard

Ah, we must shoot them
cry certain Australians

and others say No
ship them to a place

that has no rabbits
But there's a reason

there are no rabbits there
like at the North Pole

or in the Gobi Desert
or on Park Avenue

The Value of Discipline

I am very disappointed in
you, Myron.

You are a very smart boy,
and we had high hopes for
you.

But now this.

I don't know.

Go to your room.

Myron heads toward his
room,

but does his head hang low?

No way!

He is looking straight ahead
and feeling a hot black liquid
trickle through his heart.

Great galleons
bound through the rough
seas

and on them bearded men
are shouting sailor things
as if to the wind.

Back in his room
the objects look older.
What joy to make them
walk the plank!
Avast! Avaunt! Splash!
Garrrrr!

Pea Jacket

Years ago I had an old pea
jacket

Slightly scruffy but not
unclean

was my overall look and I
lacked

the easy assurance that
comes with money
because I had very little

It was okay, not having
money

I wasn't starving or lacking
anything I needed
though by contemporary
standards

I should have been envious
or angry

I wasn't

All I cared about was my
wife and friends and
family

Books writing perception
great art and gigantic
metaphysical questions
floating in on good humor

Society could take care of
itself more or less

(It turned out less)

and I was happy enough and
eager

I think what I mean is I was
young

so that no matter what
anyone might think of my
jacket

I liked it it fit well and was
warm in the New York
winter

collar turned up and hands
snug in pockets

It came from a secondhand
clothing store

at the corner of Bowery and
Bleecker maybe it
had belonged to a drunken
sailor

What do you do with a
drunken sailor early in the
morning?

Put him in bed with the
captain's daughter!

There was a label inside with
his name and serial
number scrawled on it
It felt odd wearing his name
I snipped it out

I don't have anything
monumental or
metaphoric to say about
my jacket

It's just a pleasure to
remember it and how good
it felt on me

Then one day I started
wearing something else

and a few years later I gave
the jacket to someone I
liked I don't recall who

The Ukrainian Museum

Just walking into the new and beautifully designed Ukrainian Museum was a pleasure: varnished hardwood floors, white walls, clean lines, understated lighting, and the luxury of newness. An older Ukrainian Museum had been located in a second-floor apartment in a tenement building on Second Avenue, without even a sign outside, several rooms of dismal paintings in drab light; the one time I ventured in, there was not a single soul in the place, not even a guard. Twenty years later the

museum moved a few blocks up the street to a space protected by two security checkpoints. I was greeted, if that is the word, by a woman who coldly asked me what I wanted. The two exhibition rooms were slightly larger than closets. Now, walking into this third incarnation made me feel so light and carefree that I had to be reminded to buy a ticket.

The Alexander Archipenko exhibition was the largest I had ever seen of his work, and as I moved from sculpture to sculpture I felt grateful just to be there. But I wasn't really "there," I was in a wholesale meat market. The smell of raw flesh and gore oozes out the ramshackle front doors where trucks have backed

up to disgorge sides of beef
and pork. Just inside are
butchers in threadbare
aprons streaked with blood.
One of them waddles his
mammoth girth toward me,
a cigarette dangling from his
pudgy lips, a strange leer on
his face. He is the one who
lewdly propositioned a
friend of mine who lives a
few doors away. Nineteen
sixty-one.

Now, in 2005, I am walking
through this museum on the
very spot where those
butchers slashed and
chopped up carcasses. The
fat one is no doubt dead, like
my friend and Archipenko.
The exhibition is fine, but I
can't focus on it, so I simply
pause before each piece.

Finally I can't restrain myself from approaching someone, who happened to be a guard, an Indian or Pakistani woman, to whom I say, "Many years ago, when I first came to New York, I had a friend who lived a few doors down the street. Do you know what this place was then? It was a wholesale meat business." She looks at me and says, "Yes, it's amazing the way they change things so fast," and looks away.

writes *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*. Rockefeller founds Standard Oil. Robert E. Lee dies.

1871 British Columbia joins Canada. Marcel Proust born. Rasputin born. Pneumatic rock drill invented. Stanley meets Livingstone. Whistler paints *The Artist's Mother*. The Great Fire of Chicago. P. T. Barnum opens "The Greatest Show on Earth."

1872 Jesuits expelled from Germany. Grant reelected President. Bertrand Russell born. First operation on the esophagus. Piet Mondrian born.

1873 New York financial panic. Germans evacuate France. First color

The 1870s

*H
o
m
a
g
e
to
M
ic
h
el
B
ut
o
r*

1870 Work on Brooklyn
Bridge begun. Charles
Dickens dies. Jules Verne

photograph. Zanzibar
abolishes slave trade. E.
Remington & Sons,
gunsmiths, produce
typewriters. Tolstoy writes
Anna Karenina. Buda and
Pest unite.

1874 Winston Churchill
born. Gertrude Stein born.
First roller-skating rink. First
Impressionist exhibition.
Pressure cooking invented.
Thomas Hardy writes *Far
from the Madding Crowd*.
First ice cream soda.

1875 Carl Jung born.
Thomas Mann born. Rainer
Maria Rilke born. Maurice
Ravel born. Madam
Blavatsky founds
Theosophical Society. Camille
Corot dies. Georges Bizet
dies. Hans Christian

Andersen dies. First swim across the English Channel.

1876 Korea becomes a nation. Brahms composes Symphony no. 1. Turks massacre Bulgarians. Pablo Casals born. George Sand dies. Bruno Walter born. Carpet sweeper invented. Degas paints *The Glass of Absinthe*.

1877 Edison invents the phonograph. Gustave Courbet dies. Queen Victoria becomes Empress of India. First contact lenses. Canals on Mars observed. First public telephones in the U.S.

1878 Greece declares war on Turkey. Hughes invents the microphone. Mannlicher invents the repeater rifle. W.

A. Burpee does something
with Burpee seeds.

1879 British/Zulu War.
Joseph Stalin born. Albert
Einstein born. Discovery of
saccharin. First public
telephones in London. Paul
Cézanne paints *Self-Portrait*.
Edison has an idea and
invents the light bulb.

One Thing Led to Another

If it wasn't one thing
it was another.
You can't believe
how charged everything is
with meaning
because it is meaningless.
Joy in the curtains,
the farmer in the dell,
a fellow named
whatever it was—Floyd?
And then you had arms and
legs
and it wasn't funny.
It was a freshly baked pie.
I could care
more or less.
Like a machine
in the heavens, shooting,
or an exclamation point

The Rabbi with a Puzzle Voice

Wait a minute
I forgot something
The rabbi with a puzzle voice
Pieces flying around in the
air
Texas Lithuania and now
another one
A rectangle
He is singing them

I always knew he was
And the song is oh
I don't really know what
Very old like a doughnut
And a look through its hole
But he is singing
And that's the main thing,
no?

in the motion picture
industry.

Cut.

It's always something.

"Tuck in your shirt"

is not said to a dog.

What's the use of whining?

No one really enjoys it.

The other main thing
Is that you're on that
rectangle
Floating to the ground
As it loses its oomph
And other shapes are flying
out above you
And you are on them too!
How can this be?

It is part of the jigsaw puzzle
And the sad voice that
created it
Why did you have to be
anyone
Whoever you are
Is what the rabbi sings
Whoever he is
Maybe he's not a rabbi at all

There was a reason I had
forgotten him
And a reason I remember
him
And his puzzle voice

But where are his edges
going
As now he too breaks into
pieces
Pieces pieces
That arc out in his song

Syntactical Structures

It was as if
while I was driving down a
 one-lane dirt road
with tall pines on both sides
the landscape had a syntax
similar to that of our
 language
and as I moved along
a long sentence was being
 spoken
on the right and another on
 the left
and I thought
Maybe the landscape
can understand what I say
 too.
Ahead was a farmhouse
with children playing near
 the road

so I slowed down
and waved to them.
They were young enough
to smile and wave back.

The World of Us

Who was the first person to
say
“I think the world of you”
and how did he or she come
up with it?
It’s the kind of thing
one ascribes to a god
or a great philosopher
or a lunatic
on a good day. Now
it’s a cliché
because we can’t think it,
we can only hear ourselves
saying it.

There are a lot of things we
can’t think
or don’t want to. It’s hard
for example

to think of skin as an organ
—an organ is a kidney or a
musical instrument
or even a publication—
but ask any doctor
and the doctor will say
“Yes, the skin is an organ.”
Imagine having that organ
removed
(being skinned alive)
or rather don’t
at least not too vividly.
It’s better to keep a barrier
between oneself and things
that can be horrendous
like life.

Don’t go around all day
thinking about life—
doing so will raise a barrier
between you and its instants.
You need those instants
so you can be in them,
and I need you to be in them
with me
for I think the world of us

and the mysterious
barricades
that make it possible.

But you say
“First you say to raise a
barrier
and then not to.”

Yes, because these
are two different barriers,
one a barrier against life,
the other a barrier against
being alive.

Being alive is good, life is
bad.

“So, what about being dead?
Is that bad?

And what about heaven?”

I don’t know about being
dead

because I can’t remember
what it was like,

but I do know

that it is awful and amusing
to be part heaven

and not know which part of
you it is.
Unless you don't think about
it,
in which case
you find yourself looking up
and saying

“That is *the* best cornbread
I've ever eaten.”
Along with it comes a yawn
at the end of a long and
satisfying day,
everything quiet and
thrilling
inside a consciousness
surrounded by a night
in which exclamation marks
are flying toward a single
point.

Curtain

Standing in the bathroom
 peeing
I look up at the curtain in
 front of me
red cotton with little yellow
 flowers
from Liberty Fabrics
 (London) 1970
and I feel I am flying up into
 the heavens
until I remember that soon
I will turn 70 and at any
 moment
I could feel a sudden
 paroxysmal pain
in my head and with the
 curtain
dropping away fall over
 dead—

this could happen right now!
But it doesn't, the curtain
 stays put
and I'm standing there
and the curtain still looks
 good.

Homage to Meister Eckhart

I promised myself
I would explore my void
the space I occupy
and won't
but I'm still waiting

waiting

waiting in a room
for the room to change into
an idea a flower might
have

The sun shines down on the
flower
in the idea the flower does
have at all times

and at all times you hear its
thudding
and in between the thuds
is a silence in which a thud
almost is

The first time I heard the
word *void*
it was from the Bible: “And
the earth
was without form and void.”
I was a child. I thought it
meant
the earth was without void.
Which meant nothing to me
because I did not know the
meaning of *void*.
And I didn’t know there was
a comma
that changes everything:
“was without form, and
void.”
The cosmos changed by a
comma!

from what they see
as the ears get closer and
closer
to what they hear
like the dot terribly far away
and big in front of your face
at the same time and loud

So move
the mirror
the Void
into another mirror
or Void
and just let go

But the eyes eventually
alight
on words like SPONGEBOB

SQUAREPANTS

printed on the side
of everyone's head
the way CLEM KADIDDLEHOPPER

used to be
and MEISTER ECKHART and MAX JACOB
all appearing nightly

in a revue set in the void of
heaven,
the void that allowed God to
be there
as the sole spectator
until your void and his void
were almost the same
as the void of Spongebob and
Max, Clem too,
but not quite, for, as Eckhart
says,
“The nothingness of God fills
all things
while his somethingness is
nowhere”
and so “The very best thing
you can do
is to remain still for as long
as possible”
and wait for the nothingness
of God.

Years later a big face with no
features
came out of the trees in the
night
and said, brutally, "Void"
as if handing me a gift

I opened my eyes and there
it was
in the mirror it was I or
something else
I wasn't sure
but I was happy to be in
between

My soul was growing up
It had learned how to put
quotation marks
around everything

which destroyed everything
to make two of everything
one for each eye and one for
each ear

but the eyes get further and
further apart

The Incoherent Behavior of Most Lawn Furniture

Suddenly the lawn furniture moves to different spots and stops, overturned or sideways on the ground or hovering in the air, then the pieces jerk, flip, or fly into new spots, in no pattern or rhythm. But the wooden fold-up lawn chair, with its wide strip of canvas forming a gentle sling from top to bottom, remains still. Its striped pattern ripples in the breeze, and though its wooden frame eventually turns gray it never rots or breaks, no matter how inclement the weather. Over

the years, however, this lawn
chair slowly grows less and
less visible, so slowly that no
one notices, until it
disappears. It remains there,
unseen and lost to memory,
until one day someone
remembers its green and
orange stripes, its welcoming
curve, its simplicity, there in
the sunlight.

This Schoolhouse Look

is rather cute, no? This

is how I always wanted to have my writing look

It has the charm

of the desire for perfection

that I had

when I had the charm

of not knowing better

if you can call it charm

I wanted to do better

without knowing anything

I still do

The Street

The last time I came back to
New York I didn't know
that it would be the last time
you'd be here
though you *are* still here in
the form of you
who a block away walk
toward me until it *isn't*
you,
it's someone with a fine head
and silver hair and blue
eyes
and the suggestion of not
being like anyone else
and it's you I'm waiting for
as I walk past Little Poland
or come out of New York
Central Art Supply or stop
to look

The Street

The last time I came back to
New York I didn't know
that it would be the last time
you'd be here
though you *are* still here in
the form of you
who a block away walk
toward me until it *isn't*
you,
it's someone with a fine head
and silver hair and blue
eyes
and the suggestion of not
being like anyone else
and it's you I'm waiting for
as I walk past Little Poland
or come out of New York
Central Art Supply or stop
to look

at the poppy seed cake in the
window of Baczynsky's on
Second Avenue,
the cake I brought up to your
place sometimes
when we were working
together and you'd say
"Tea?"
as if it were spelled with only
the one letter.

Knowing you were there
made me be more here
too,
made New York be New
York,
fueled my anger at the new
buildings that ruined the
old ones
and at the new people with
their coarseness and self-
involvement
you avoided by going out to
buy the *Times* at 5 a.m.,
then came back and made
yourself a pot of espresso

and read the paper as if you
were in Tuscany
which is where you soon will
be
in that niche in the wall all
ten pounds of you
and I'll leave the city that's
slipped a little further
away no a lot.

Paris Again

I'm afraid of the thrill of
touching you again
and seeing you appear
before my eyes
because you are beautiful
the way things used to be.

One day I sat down in a café
and ordered an *accent aigu*
and a *citron pressé* and
looked at Paris.

I said to myself This is Paris
and you
are in it so you are Paris too.

Garçon,
encore un accent aigu s'il
vous plaît

but he didn't look pleased he
was Parisian.

they were both made of
granite. But they weren't.
And neither was I, like those
who love and have loved
and are still afraid of the
thrill of the beauty of
everything that is gone.

London, 1815

We go clippety-clop
because we are horseshoes
on cobblestones. O
to be a houseshoe
in a house
and resting comfortably
alongside another
houseshoe!

But the horse clops on,
our echos echoing
down a dark alley
behind a dark house.

Maybe I too could learn how
to be grumpy
and snooty and Cartesian
and quick all at the same
time.

The Nord-Sud metro line ran
all the way
from the tips of my toes to
the top of my head
where it paused and went
down again
and every time it went past
Odéon I thought
of Reverdy and how grumpy
and suddenly fiery he could
be and figured
he would have no patience
with a guy like me
who had a touch of Max
Jacob ready
to leap up and turn an angel
into a sad witticism
about the God Pierre was
wrestling with as if

Of Copse and Coppice

When asked
if I knew the meaning
of the word *copse* c-o-p-s-e
I said “Of course, it means . . .
I think it means a field
or meadow.” One
of the first poems
I ever wrote said
“Where is the copse
with verdant green?”
because at age thirteen
I wanted to use
words new to me.
Now *copse* is new again
because I’m now not sure
just what it means.
A coppice is a thicket,
no?

Oh you're such
an American! out
of touch
with the natural world
and English English
and your own
adolescence
all at the same time!
Alas, I've wandered
lonely as a crowd
of words
blown down the street
this way and that,
vagabond lexicon
dressed as a citizen.

Maybe a wood or a
grove?
I've always liked
my grandfather's
name Grover
and one of the most
beautiful girls
of my adolescence
was named
Madeleine Grove

and back then
my favorite
publisher was
Grove.

Shady Grove, my
true love
the song goes. Them
I remember. *Copse*
and *coppice* are
phonemes
from literature. I
preferred
cops and robbers.

But it got better.
I nabbed the
robbers
and shot a few
Indians
clean out of
their saddles
but they didn't
have saddles
and weren't
even Indians

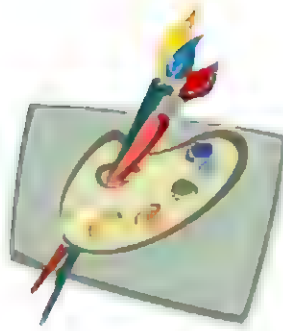
and it didn't
matter:
you had to go
and in a few
minutes
I did too,
due as I was
in this verdant
copse
splashed with
shadows
that shift and
wave like plaid
in the wind
from off the
brae.

Manifestation and Mustache

I love living here
away from a lot of things
that annoy me
and close to a lot
of things I love
like air like trees
and emptiness.
But the thing
I love best
goes where I go
and will go with me
when I am gone
from where I am
and into
where love
doesn't figure,
which I have done
a few times

in my life,
if memory serves.
Then
the mustache
comes in
and says,
“You can’t be right
and wrong
at the same time,”
but I don’t believe it.

French Art in the 1950s



Ronnie is finding out about art in the 1950s. He is learning that it had a palette and brushes and colors, and the palette had a hole, in which the brushes were inserted and where they seemed debonnaire and ready to do something but also happy not to. There is an artist in the room. He wears a smock and a beret, and he has a pencil mustache. His name is Pierre, for he is

Shipwreck in General

Is there no end to anything
ever

I release the question mark
From its tether and it floats
Like a life jacket
In search of the shipwreck
That every question is

But today it finds no victim
No flotsam no captain's cap
For today is shipwreck-free it
is

The end of shipwreck in
general

And the curl and the dot
below

Can go their separate ways
And be whatever they like

French. Art comes from France. Pierre is going to bring some more of it to us. But at the moment he is thinking about what he is going to paint today. A pear? A young woman who is wearing no clothing? Or perhaps just a lot of colors flying around on the canvas, to represent his feelings?

But wait, it is time for lunch. Later in the afternoon he will execute his picture. For now he must go to the café and greet his admirers, who, on seeing him, call out “Pierre!” and “Over here, Pierre!” and, cleverly, “There he is, the rascal!” But everyone knows that Pierre is not a rascal. He is a French artist. You can tell by the smock he has forgotten to remove. Later, when it has

paint smears and spots on it,
even an imbecile will be able
to see that he is an artist.
Ronnie already knows.

The Door to the River

You walked through it before
you even knew it was there

The river came up to the
door
and asked to come in

Then the river came through
the door
and the door floated away

I once threw away a river
because it looked old enough

And I bought a new one
and a door along with it

Except it never was a door
It was a doorway

Like Norway
with windows

Zot

In de Kooning's painting, the
word *zot*.

I thought *sot*?

Then learned that *zot*
is Dutch for *foolish*. So
foolish and *drunk* swirled
around

and separated out
into the Dutch *foolish* and
the English *drunk*.

He wasn't such a big drinker
when he did that painting,
but maybe he felt like a fool
sometimes

—of course he did.

He was *zot* and he knew it
and he told you so, you
being almost nobody,
so almost nobody you were
even more *zot* than he!

*Three Poems in Honor of
Willem de Kooning*

I Felt

For a moment
as if I were talking to you
and you were listening
and taking me seriously
the way a grandfather does
when he's open and kind,
you knew what
was troubling me
and you knew
that the best thing to do
was to listen
and say nothing,
allowing a calm to settle
into the grandfather
that turns out to be me.

Zot is vat I tink.

Alone and Not Alone

Out of the water
came the one
who reached back
into the water
and pulled out the zero.

The time is now.

The time is now 8:15 p.m.
Eastern Standard Time.

In Beijing Lan Lan
is getting up
tomorrow.

I see her pretty, smiling face
as she curls back the covers.

Tonight I
will get under the covers
and think of her face

not because I
am in love with her
but because I
like her face
though I
do not want it
on my head.

Out of the water
came my head,
head first, whoosh!
A person's head
does not belong
underwater.

Look at fish!
Who wants to be one?

I would
for a moment
or two. Then
back to me.

It would be terrible
to alternate
being fish
and person

every few seconds.

We inhale
then exhale
every few seconds.

Lan Lan's
two daughters
are inhaling and exhaling,
still asleep—
it is Sunday
in Beijing.

Lan Lan's husband
is sitting at a table
in the kitchen
thinking
about the poetry
of Alexander Blok.

Alexander Blok
is pouring hot water
into the teapot.
Out of the water
came the tea
and out of the tea
came the scent of jasmine.

And then Alexander Blok
was not there.
He had to go away
and die again.

He exhaled and then
exhaled, and then
was like a dead fish,
wrapped in a newspaper
whose headline says

BLOK DEAD.

He reached back
and pulled himself
out of life
and into those two words.

Lan Lan's husband
looks up confused—
his mind is in Russian
but everything else
is in Chinese
when she comes in
and the jasmine is deeper
and more of you now.

It is 8:33.

What happened?

You were not alone
in thinking you were alone.



COFFEE HOUSE PRESS

The mission of Coffee House Press is to publish exciting, vital, and enduring authors of our time; to delight and inspire readers; to contribute to the cultural life of our community; and to enrich our literary heritage. By building on the best traditions of publishing and the book arts, we produce books that celebrate imagination, innovation in the craft of writing, and the many authentic voices of the American experience.

Visit us at
coffeehousepress.org.

Funder Acknowledgments

Coffee House Press is an independent, nonprofit literary publisher. All of our books, including the one in your hands, are made possible through the generous support of grants and donations from corporate giving programs, state and federal support, family foundations, and the many individuals that believe in the transformational power of literature. We receive major operating support from Amazon, the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts—a federal agency, and Target.

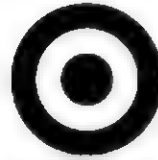
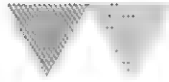
This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

Coffee House Press receives additional support from many anonymous donors; the Alexander Family Fund; the Archer Bondarenko Munificence Fund; the Elmer L. & Eleanor J. Andersen Foundation; the David & Mary Anderson Family Foundation; the W. & R. Bernheimer Family Foundation; the E. Thomas Binger & Rebecca Rand Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation; the Patrick & Aimee Butler Family Foundation; the Buuck

Family Foundation; the Carolyn Foundation; Dorsey & Whitney Foundation; Fredrikson & Byron, P.A.; the Jerome Foundation; the Lenfestey Family Foundation; the Mead Witter Foundation; the Nash Foundation; the Rehael Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation; the Schwab Charitable Fund; Schwegman, Lundberg & Woessner, P.A.; Penguin Group; the Private Client Reserve of US Bank; VSA Minnesota for the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council; the Archie D. & Bertha H. Walker Foundation; the Wells Fargo Foundation of Minnesota; and the Woessner Freeman Family Foundation.



ART WORKS.
arts.gov



TARGET.



MINNESOTA
STATE ARTS BOARD

amazon.com

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

The Publisher's Circle of Coffee House Press

Publisher's Circle members make significant contributions to Coffee House Press's annual giving campaign. Understanding that a strong financial base is necessary for the press to meet the challenges and opportunities that arise each year, this group plays a crucial part in the success of our mission.

“Coffee House Press believes that American literature should be as diverse as America itself. Known for consistently championing authors whose work challenges cultural and

æsthetic norms, we believe
their books deserve space in
the marketplace of ideas.

Publishing literature has
never been an easy business,
and publishing literature
that truly takes risks is a
cause we believe is worthy of
significant support. We ask
you to join us today in
helping to ensure the future
of Coffee House Press.”

—THE PUBLISHER’S CIRCLE MEMBERS OF
COFFEE HOUSE PRESS

PUBLISHER’S CIRCLE MEMBERS

Many Anonymous Donors

Mr. & Mrs. Rand L.

Alexander

Suzanne Allen

Patricia Beithon

Bill Berkson & Connie

Lewallen

Robert & Gail Buuck
Claire Casey
Louise Copeland
Jane Dalrymple-Hollo
Mary Ebert & Paul Stembler
Chris Fischbach & Katie
Dublinski
Katharine Freeman
Sally French
Jocelyn Hale & Glenn Miller
Roger Hale & Nor Hall
Jeffrey Hom
Kenneth & Susan Kahn
Kenneth Koch Literary Estate
Stephen & Isabel Keating
Allan & Cinda Kornblum
Leslie Larson Maheras
Jim & Susan Lenfestey
Sarah Lutman & Rob
Rudolph
Carol & Aaron Mack
George Mack
Joshua Mack
Gillian McCain
Mary & Malcolm McDermid

Sjur Midness & Briar
Andresen
Peter Nelson & Jennifer
Swenson
Marc Porter & James
Hennessy
E. Thomas Binger & Rebecca
Rand Fund of the
Minneapolis Foundation
Jeffrey Sugerman & Sarah
Schultz
Nan Swid
Patricia Tilton
Stu Wilson & Melissa Barker
Warren D. Woessner & Iris C.
Freeman
Margaret & Angus Wurtele

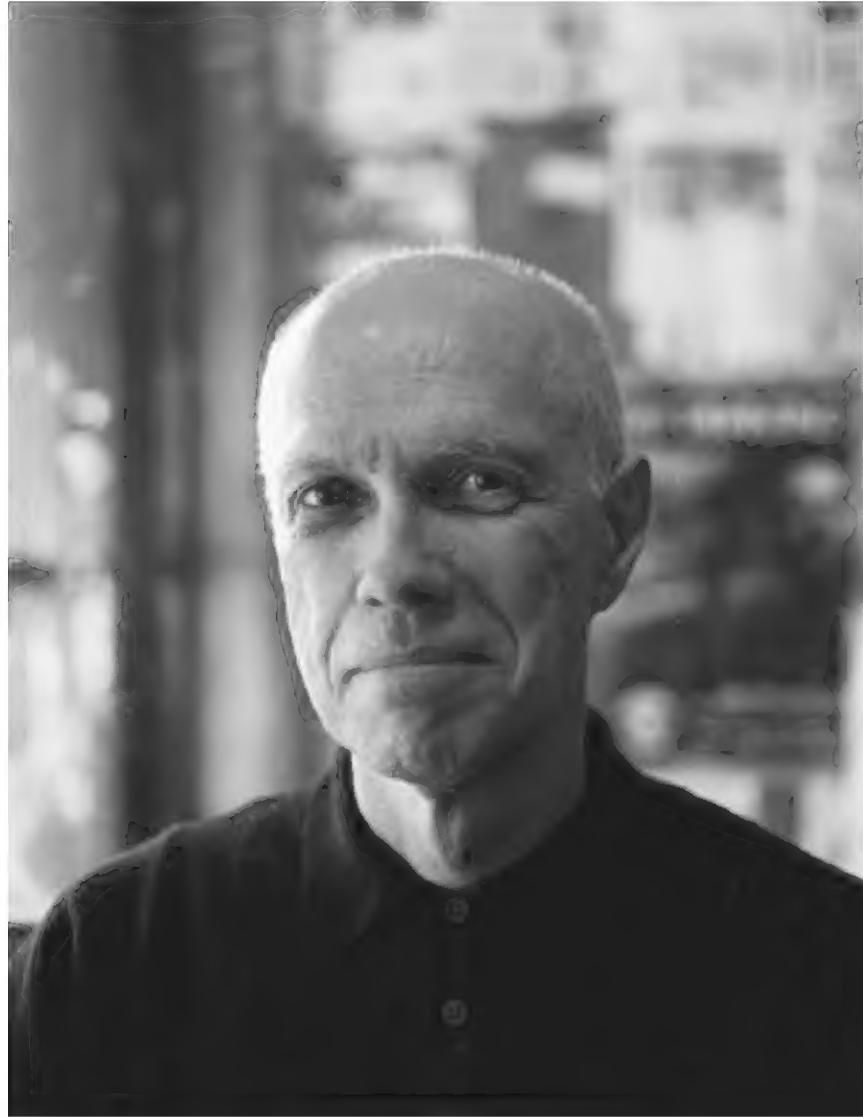
For more information about
the Publisher's Circle and
other ways to support Coffee
House Press books, authors,
and activities, please visit
www.coffeehousepress.org/s

upport or contact us at:
info@coffeehousepress.org.

Allan Kornblum, 1949– 2014

Vision is about looking at the world and seeing not what it is, but what it could be. Allan Kornblum's vision and leadership created Coffee House Press. To celebrate his legacy, every book we publish in 2015 will be in his memory.

Alone and Not Alone was
designed at Coffee House
Press, in the historic Grain
Belt Brewery's Bottling
House near downtown
Minneapolis. The text is set
in Adobe Garamond.
Composition by Bookmobile
Design & Digital Publisher
Services, Minneapolis,
Minnesota. Manufactured by
Versa Press on acid- free
paper.



RON PADGETT grew up in Tulsa and has lived mostly in New York City since 1960. Among his many honors are a Guggenheim Fellowship, the American Academy of

Arts and Letters poetry award, the Shelley Memorial Award, and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Padgett's *How Long* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in poetry and his *Collected Poems* won the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for the best poetry book of 2013. In addition to being a poet, he is a translator of Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy, and Blaise Cendrars. His own work has been translated into eighteen languages.